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**Auditory Atmospheres: Music, Media Technologies, and Literary Representation**

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC)

Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen

January 12, 2021

<https://www.uni-giessen.de/faculties/gcsc/gcsc/events/gcsc-keynote-lecture-series>

*Five Theses for Discussion*

1. What is the status of the literary representation of music in the age of media-technological reproducibility? In our digital age, computers and earphones allow the listener to experience the bodily and affective immersion in a seemingly limitless cyberspace of music files, whose aura they can project back onto their surroundings, transforming reality into resonant projection screens of their own fantasies, desires, and aesthetic sentiments.
2. The inherently diffuse character of the concept of atmosphere lends itself to further explorations of its interdisciplinary “travels” through a largely uncharted territory encompassing sound studies, philosophy, and literary criticism.
3. The possibilities and limitations of digitally mediated atmospheres open up a new understanding of the literary representation of musical experiences by high-modernist writers.
4. A  comparison between Thomas Mann's description of the production of musical entrancement by the fashionable gramophone in *Der Zauberberg* and Georg Trakl's exploration of the Orpheus myth in his poem "Passion" (see end of this document) reveals a hidden conflict in early 20th century culture between state-of-the-art media-technological reproducibility and a seemingly anachronistic exploration of "live" or "real-time" musical atmospheres through the literary imagination.
5. Drawing from various interdisciplinary positions, I propose to define auditory atmospheres as highly contingent framework conditions of sonic, especially musical experiences. Emerging in the evanescent here and now, they promise a temporary suspension of the alienating subject-object split through the immersion of the human subject’s imagination in affective encounters with intensively captivating acoustic events. But ultimately this effect is a phantasm, an illusion, albeit one that is of the greatest significance for meaningful listening. Triggering something in the audience’s unconsciousness and directly affecting their bodily disposition, auditory atmospheres—whether live or technologically mediated—partially opens themselves to analytic reflection but only afterwards, in a belated intellectual response forming itself once the initial shock of the sonic experience has settled down or passed away.

Georg Trakl, “Passion” (2. version, 1914):

Wenn Orpheus silbern die Laute rührt,

Beklagend ein Totes im Abendgarten,

Wer bist du Ruhendes unter hohen Bäumen?

Es rauscht die Klage das herbstliche Rohr,

Der blaue Teich,

Hinsterbend unter grünenden Bäumen

Und folgend dem Schatten der Schwester;

Dunkle Liebe

Eines wilden Geschlechts,

Dem auf goldenen Rädern der Tag davonrauscht.

Stille Nacht.

Unter finsteren Tannen

Mischten zwei Wölfe ihr Blut

In steinerner Umarmung; ein Goldnes

Verlor sich die Wolke über dem Steg,

Geduld und Schweigen der Kindheit.

Wieder begegnet der zarte Leichnam

Am Tritonsteich

Schlummernd in seinem hyazinthenen Haar.

Daß endlich zerbräche das kühle Haupt!

Denn immer folgt, ein blaues Wild,

Ein Äugendes unter dämmernden Bäumen,

Dieser dunkleren Pfaden

Wachend und bewegt von nächtigem Wohllaut,

Sanftem Wahnsinn;

Oder es tönte dunkler Verzückung

Voll das Saitenspiel

Zu den kühlen Füßen der Büßerin

In der steinernen Stadt.[[1]](#footnote-2)

When Orpheus silver stirs the lyre,

Lamenting the dead in the evening garden,

Who are you at rest beneath high trees?

Lament rustles the autumn reeds,

The blue pond,

Dying away beneath greening trees

And following the sister’s shadow;

Dark love

Of a wild race,

From which the day rushes away on wheels of gold.

Silent night.

Beneath dark firs

Two wolves married their blood

In stony embrace; a golden form

The cloud vanished over the little bridge,

Patience and silence of childhood.

Encounter again the tender corpse

By the Triton pond

Slumbering in her hyacinthine hair.

That the cool head might shatter at last!

For always a blue deer follows,

An eying form beneath dusking trees,

These darker paths

Waking and stirred by nocturnal euphony,

Gentle madness;

Or the string play sounded

Swollen with dark ecstasy

A the cool feet of the penitent woman

In the stony city.[[2]](#footnote-3)

1. Georg Trakl, *Dichtungen und Briefe.* Ed. Hans Weichselbaum (Salzburg, Wien: Otto Müller, 2020), 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Will Stone, (trans.), *Surrender to Night: Collected Poems by Georg Trakl*. Selected and translated by Will Stone. London: Pushkin Press, 2019, 182-83. Trans. modified. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)